

THE ALTON MESSENGER

A COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER FOR
THE CITY OF ALTON

<http://www.alton-tx.gov/>

FIRST QUARTER 2007 - JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH



Alton City Commission

Salvador Vela
Mayor

Arturo Galvan
Mayor Pro-Tem

Ricardo Garza
Commissioner

Oscar Tovar
Commissioner

Dr. José Picasso, D.C.
Commissioner

Hilario Rincones
City Manager

WHAT'S INSIDE?

- Fiesta Alton 2007
- Guide to local government
- Vicious dog ordinance
- Department spotlight
- Community focus
- Change in trash collection

Drop by City Hall or write us at editor@alton-tx.gov with your opinions, submissions, or ideas for the next issue!

Mayor's Note



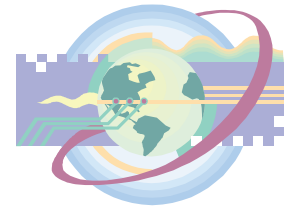
It seems that every time I see one of our citizens or friends who live outside our city, the most common comment made is that "our community has changed so much" or that "it is changing rapidly." It is fair to say that change is in the air in the City of Alton. I am sure there are those that would like Alton to be what it was 20 or 30 years ago. Some may say change is not occurring quickly enough. Whatever side of the fence you may be on, it is important to note that change can be good for some while others may take time to adjust.

Most of the change we are experiencing is the growth of our community. And it is changing rapidly. The city manager reminds me on a weekly basis that we are no longer the sleepy little community in the corner of the Valley, but rather a self-contained community. Within one year we project our population will nearly double from the 2000 U.S. Census count. This of course means that much of the change will mean a surge in traffic, new faces in our community, and new business opportunities for our entrepreneurs, etc. This change also brings many concerns over traffic congestion, crowding in the schools, increase in petty crime, a need for more emergency responders, more building inspectors, improvements to our parks, and a need for new and improved infrastructure. It is safe to say that change can be good but it does bring on some justifiable concerns. The million dollar question becomes, "can we stop the growth?" I do not think so.

I believe the best way for us to address these changes is by working together to adapt to them. The irony is that most organizations deal with change by changing. Those that remain stagnant are destined to overlook new opportunities and rarely move forward. Please join me to meet the new challenges and as our community grows we will also benefit from doing so together.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and thank you Lord for your favor and blessing over the great City of Alton.

Salvador Vela
Mayor of Alton



The City of Alton is on the web! Make it your gateway to city services, community events, and news!
<http://www.alton-tx.gov/>



Come join the community for a celebration complete with music, booths, children carnival rides, and activities!

continued on page 2



The City awarded a 5 year contract to Allied Waste to collect trash and brush effective May 1st, 2007.

continued on page 4

**VICIOUS DOG
ORDINANCE
\$91.060**

**A reminder to
residents about the
local law requirements
for owning a vicious
dog in Alton.**

continued on page 4

Fiesta **ALTON** 2007

The Greater Alton Chamber of Commerce and the City of Alton are planning the first ever Fiesta Alton. We are very excited about offering the community a memorable event filled with fun for the family with music, exciting entertainment, and delicious food.

The Fiesta will start with a fundraising Gala Banquet on Friday May 4th; there will be a special recognition for the Texas A&M University – Colonias Program and other distinguished contributors for their involvement to enhance the overall quality of life in the City of Alton and the

surrounding areas. For more information call Rosie Tello at 581-2733.

In our efforts to promote family fitness for residents in Alton, Texas A&M University-Colonias Program has taken the lead to bring you the *First Annual 5k "Family Fitness Run/Walk" on May 5th.* We encourage all the families to come and participate at this event; there will be t-shirts for all participants and trophies for winners in different age categories. Call Alan Rios at 519-2123 to register.

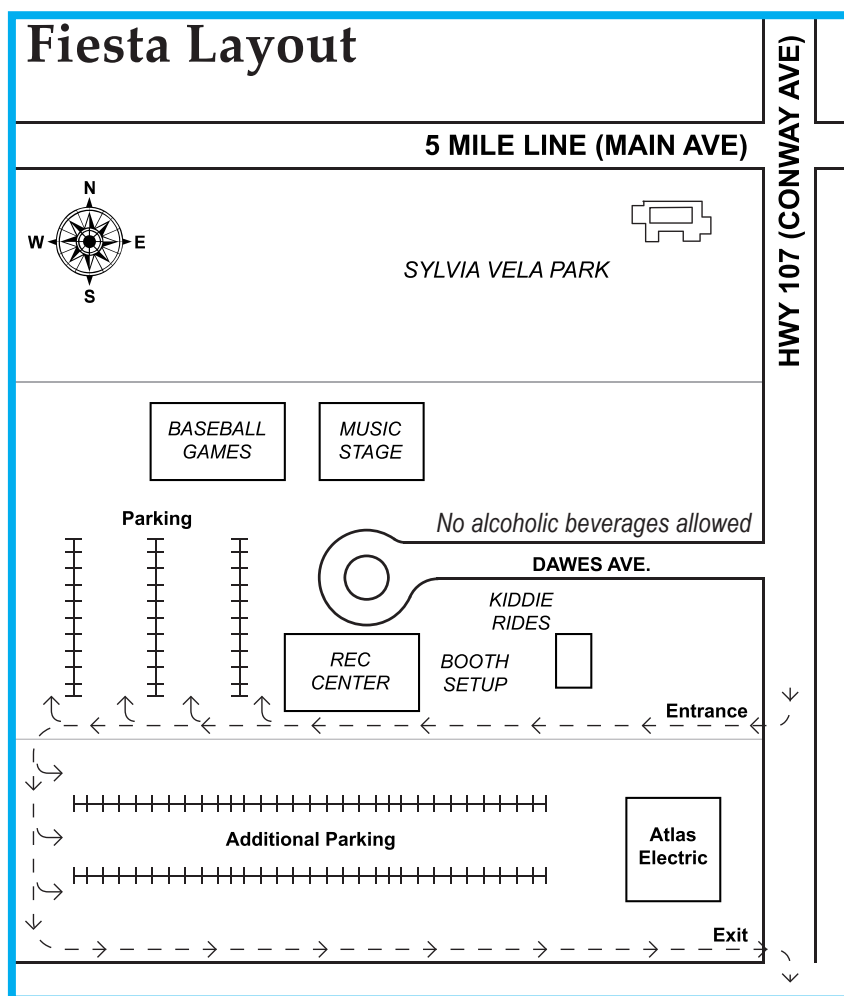
Sunday May 6th is the grand day! We start with a Health and Housing Fair, where an array of agencies, both public and private, will represent their organizations. You can partake in some of the free services and obtain information about health and housing service providers. If you are interested in setting up a table at the fair, call Laura Treviño at 447-9355.

Additionally, several youth baseball teams will participate in a tournament that will start on May 4th and will end on May 6th with an awards ceremony. For more information call Alex Rangel at 534-6570.

The program will follow with a variety of entertainment, music, mariachis, food vendors, kiddie carnival, and games. *We will finish Fiesta with a performance by Grammy-Nominated VolumenX.* We are so proud of their accomplishments and we'll be sure to give them a great welcome and special recognition that night.

If you are interested in volunteering at this great event *or having a booth* for selling food, arts & crafts, jewelry, or games contact Rosie Tello at 581-2733 or Marina Trevino at 867-3850.

Fiesta Layout



Fiesta Location:
4 ¾ Mi N. Conway
Alton, TX



Fiesta **1ST ANNUAL**

ALTON

MAY 4TH - 6TH

ALTON RECREATION CENTER

Friday: Gala (6:00 pm ticketed fundraising event)

Saturday: Family Fitness 5K Run/Walk
Youth Baseball Tournament
 (both events start at 8:00 am)

Sunday: Family Health & Housing Fair
Youth Baseball Tournament
 (both events start at 10:00 am)
& Much More...

**Family
Fun**

**Dance
Groups**
 2:00 pm

Come join the fun

Music
 6:00 pm

**Mariachi
Bands**
 2:00 pm

**Grammy
Nominee**



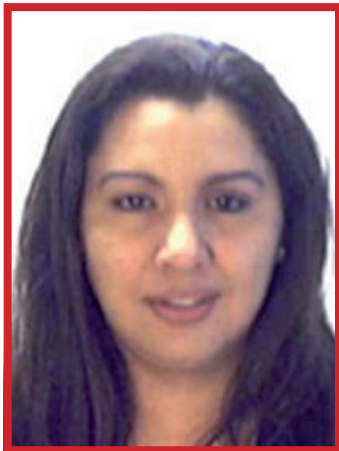
volumenX

**Kiddie
Carnival**
 10:00 am

Food

Department Spotlight

An interview with Janie Gaytan, City Secretary



How long have you been with the City of Alton?

I started on April 2003 as a Permits Clerk. I was responsible for the issuance of all permits within the city. In 2005 I was promoted to City Secretary.

What are the major roles and duties of a City Secretary?

Some of the major roles include meeting all of the legal requirements for posting agendas, publishing legal notices, conducting elections and preserving records. In addition, I have also been serving as administrative secretary for the City Manager. So in effect I do the best in fulfilling the responsibilities for two positions.

Why is good recordkeeping important to City administration?

Good recordkeeping is essential due to the need of informing the public of the local laws that govern everyday life. City staff also needs to know, abide by, and enforce these laws set forth by the elected officials.

What has been your greatest challenge as City Secretary?

During city elections I am also the voting clerk for an election ordered by an authority of the city. My greatest challenge came while I was conducting my first election because it was my duty to ensure a smooth running election.

I never knew elections could be so emotional and partisan. It makes it difficult because in a small town everyone knows everybody and my hope was that people can remain civil during the entire process.

Vicious Dog Ordinance, continued from Page 1

Defined as, "being any animal which, without provocation, has attacked or injured a human being or domestic animal." Also, "any animal, without provocation, chases or approaches a person upon any public or private property in a menacing fashion or apparent attitude of attack."

The City Manager and Code Enforcer may deem such a dog vicious and in order for owners to keep such an animal they have to comply with the following: 1) Dog must be confined in a pen or structure; 2) Dog must be muzzled and on a leash or chain if it leaves its pen; 3) Owner must display signs visible from the street and where the animal is confined warning them of the presence of vicious dog; and 4) Owner must have public liability insurance of at least \$100,000 to cover damage or personal injury by the animal.

If your dog has a propensity to be menacing or violent (actually bite) then it is for everyone's safety (your family and those around you) that we adhere to this ordinance.

City Manager's Note

by Hilario Rincones

I would like to share some thoughts on three of the articles in the newsletter you are reading. As you can see, there will be a fiesta this year and hopefully for years to come. This annual family event has been a dream of many folks who wanted to bring their families together for plain old fun, food and relaxation. This year the City and the Greater Alton Chamber of Commerce have partnered to bring this event to you for your enjoyment. While the event will no doubt be a success, I want to remind each one in the community there has been much work in planning Fiesta Alton. Most importantly, it has brought together many volunteers who are sharing their expertise and time for this event. While this event is being held as a big "family gathering," it is important to note that the 5K run and walk are for the entire community to participate in. Our participation will serve as a model to children to teach the importance of exercise for a healthy body. To further promote quality of life we have also integrated a health and housing fair for the community to inquire more into these two very important topics.



Secondly, we have included in this newsletter important information about our city and how to make the best use of the services available. Knowing who to contact saves time and can get you results more quickly. It is also important for you to know that much of what each department of the city does is based on ordinances passed by our city council- who sets the policy for our city. The role of management and staff is to make sure everyone is complying with the ordinances passed by our council. More importantly, no matter the problem you may have now or in the future, rest assured that we hope we can deal with your concern in an efficient and professional matter. That is what we strive for.

Finally, beginning May 1st 2007, new trash and brush service will be offered by a new company. Yes, I did say brush service as well. We have successfully negotiated a contract to provide trash and brush service to every household and business in the community- which per our contract and per ordinance must receive services by this company. Please be patient with all of us as we transition to this new contract. The most important part of this agreement is that rates will be lower while you receive an additional service of brush pick-up.

Please enjoy our newsletter and we hope to see each one of you at the 5K run and walk event at the Alton Fiesta activities.

Allied Waste, continued from Page 1

Every resident that has a water meter will receive a new waste container and will be billed accordingly. The new contract lowers your monthly bill and supplies you with an added service. The new \$13.38 base price (plus \$3.10 of processing fees and taxes) means that for \$16.48 you will get quality weekly trash pick up and monthly brush pickup for one price. Previously, residents were charged a \$16.10 base price (plus \$3.58 processing fees and taxes) which for \$19.68 did not include brush pickup. Now you can get more service for less money!



Think about an alien landing. We thought of *la chupacabra*, little green humanoids, E.T., but not the most common alien: human kind. Whether a recent immigrant, a new or current resident in the Alton community, we sometimes land into a need for emergency response or require guidance for building an extension to our house. This process can be alienating when your frustration meets government bureaucracy.

Simply being able to talk to the right person about your request can save you valuable time on resolving your matter. That is why we will illustrate the most common requests for city services and which department to contact. While we can handle most of your requests, in the event that we cannot, we strive to guide you to the resources that can.

City Secretary- Who's got the power here? Apparently you do. Home rule government was established through a City Charter approved by the majority vote of the qualified voters of the City of Alton in the May 2006 election. The City Charter is to Alton like the Constitution is to the United States and depicts all powers of city officials and offices. This is important because citizens established the system of rule in Alton. This means voting residents can amend that system by majority vote in an election. Locally-elected officials make local laws called "ordinances" which are viewable by contacting the City Secretary in City Hall.

Code Enforcement- As ordinances give local guidance to how Alton should operate in a peaceful and productive manner. Local officials such as Code Enforcement assure those ordinances not requiring law enforcement are met. They enforce provisions of the ordinances where their services are applicable such as: nuisances (noisy, smelly, and unsightly households), illegal dumping and littering, peddling, zoning/sign regulations, address change (with copies of tax statement and current water bill), junked vehicles, and weedy lots. Ordinance 79-11 is one of the most important and highly used by the code enforcement official because it states that weeds, rubbish, motor vehicles, dilapidated buildings, burned hulls, or any objectionable, unsightly and unsanitary matter are considered a public nuisance. If you live next to a weedy lot or have questions concerning other public annoyances or dangers to health contact Code Enforcement.

Maintenance- Public infrastructure requires constant care and maintenance. In order to better facilitate the needs of the community, this department has been divided into three sub-departments: building maintenance, parks and recreation, and street maintenance. This department is responsible for a wide variety of municipal public works projects including: maintenance of parks, municipal buildings, alley ways, animal control, responsible for overseeing the cleaning of weedy lots, review of construction and assist with minor construction projects.

This department also participates in the planning for long range public works development in conjunction with other city departments. We also provide a quick response and follow-up to complaints from the general public, such as reports of graffiti.

Permits- If you build a driveway, fence, porch, do plumbing, electrical, storage room, remodel, build additions, patio, pool, garage, move a home, covered parking, and any foundation, you will need to request a permit from the city. Permit pricing ranges from \$5.00 to \$100, depending on the complexity (review and oversight) of the project. The City of Alton would like to inform the citizens of Alton, that for their safety, it is imperative that construction on any of the afore-mentioned items you have our city inspectors review the ordinances, requirements, and your property for proper placement, specifications, and safety concerns. Please remember that the City of Alton is protecting the public from unsafe conditions when enforcing ordinances and codes. The City of Alton might also save you time and money when reviewing your project.

Police- Whether it is a complaint about a noisy neighbor to a crime in progress, there are a few distinctions to keep in mind. When law enforcement is needed there are two different manners in which to contact the agency by telephone: 1) Emergency (911): only used when there is reason to believe someone's life is in danger or someone's property is in the process of being stolen or damaged; and 2) Non emergency (581-2602): to be used for complaints ranging from noisy neighbors to loose dogs or any other non life threatening incident.

The officer on the scene will make a full report and submit that to the investigators. It is important to note that the more information provided, the faster a case can be resolved. Information that should be provided to the agency include: address, name of caller, phone number from where they are calling, description of what is happening, description of any persons at the location involved in the incident, description of any vehicles involved.

Municipal Court- Warning on failure to appear or by not paying the fine on or before your court appearance date will result in a warrant of arrest and will result in denial of your driver's license, permit and/or vehicle registration of re-registration. The Court will issue a warrant for the arrest of any defendant who has failed to appear to answer a traffic notice. A second conviction of failure to maintain financial responsibility will result in the suspension of your driver's license and motor vehicle registration unless you file and maintain proof of financial responsibility with the Department of Public Safety for two (2) years from the date of conviction.

Fire- The Alton Volunteer Fire Dept. has five fire trucks and personnel on call 24 hours a day. Our personnel consist of both paid and volunteer fire fighters working around the clock to serve the City of Alton and its citizens in case of an emergency. We encourage the citizens to always call 911 in case of an emergency as well as to report illegal burning and dumping of trash to our non emergency line (956) 581-5800. In case you are the victim of a house fire the Alton Vol. Fire Dept. is committed to try to get you assistance with either the Salvation Army or the Red Cross. These agencies will ask for a report on the damage on your property which we provide.

As you can see, governance and service begins and ends with the resident. We strive to maintain the best service possible, and with frequent communication you can keep your government accountable. Our various departments are always hard at work in their respective areas, but never too busy to help you. Now that you've been given a glimpse of their primary roles do not hesitate to contact them directly for assistance.

For more information go to: <http://www.alton-tx.gov/services.html>



Tobacco Policy Change

An initiative is underway to promote clean air and healthy living in the City of Alton. The Texas A&M University-Colonias Program received a grant from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that focuses on tobacco policy change in the area of Alton. This project seeks to improve the air quality and provide a healthier living environment for the residents and community at large. This feat is accomplished by utilizing the expertise of a community health worker or *promotora* and the greater community involvement to create this change.

Promotora Maria Luisa Garza will help educate the community about tobacco usage and its negative health effects. In the month of April, she will focus on organizing educational meetings to convey the information on promoting clean air and healthier communities. These meetings will be held in colonias, churches, and local schools located in the area of Alton. for more information call 519-2123 or email mluisag1@aol.com.

RGV Empowerment Zone

The Rio Grande Valley Empowerment Zone is currently assisting Senior Citizens to apply for Food Stamp benefits. Ms. Adela Salinas, FSEOP Outreach Specialist, conducts home visits to those interested.

Ms. Salinas assists in filling out applications and submits them to the local Department of Health and Human Services. For additional information or to schedule an appointment, please call Ms. Adela Salinas at 683-3745 or 292-9719.



Hurricane Awareness Week

After recent AP reports that 2007 will be a "very active" hurricane season, residents should note that May 20 through the 26th will be the Hurricane Awareness Week. National, State and local government efforts will be on the forefront to inform the public about preparedness and local evacuations plans.

You can look out for the media events or take action now. Make sure you are familiar with your evacuation routes and have a three (to seven) day supply of potable water and food. Safety comes through knowledge, so for more information please visit: <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/HAW2/>



La Union del Pueblo Entero is a 501(c)(3) non profit organization founded by Cesar E. Chavez. We are dedicated to the effort to help low income families build better lives and stronger communities by developing self help opportunities and engaging them in the civic life of the region. Cesar taught us that people have the obligation to organize themselves in order to advocate for solutions to the problems they confront every day.

On March 31st organization and individuals across the country celebrated the birthday of our renowned founder and leader, Cesar E. Chavez. This year's celebration will mark LUPE's fourth annual Cesar Chavez Day March in the Valley. The theme for this year's event was, "ORGANIZANDO – HACEMOS EL CAMBIO. "

LUPE members have been actively working for positive change in their communities. They have worked on safety issues, construction of parks, reduction of property taxes, public lighting and immigration reform. Members look forward to participating in improving education for their children and finding ways to access affordable insurance and healthcare for their families. Call the local LUPE office for more information: 584-3636.

After School Program

We know that unfortunately many children are left alone after school to find their own entertainment in the streets or spend so many hours at home alone without adult supervision. The Alton Recreation Center is offering you a year-round facility and an After School Program for your children to stay up to 7:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday.

We provide an array of activities, such as Arts & Crafts, board games, basketball, volleyball, etc. For those who need assistance with their homework, we count with some Americorps Youth Harvest, all of them high school seniors, that gladly help students with reading, math, science, etc.



We would like to extend the invitation to all the parents to enroll the Adults Program, where you can workout at the weight room, use the gym for practice basketball, volleyball, etc. The schedule for adults is from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. For more information call Joe Guajardo at 519-2123.

